CLAIMS

1. (Amended) A method for authenticating a document including the steps of:

a) scanning the document for one or more pre-existing identifying features and/or indicia;

b) comparing the scanned features/indicia against stored information in a database identifying the features/indicia as authentic or otherwise; and

c) transmitting a signal confirming whether or not the document is authentic or otherwise.

2. (Amended) A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein:

the pre-existing scanned features/indicia include watermarks, holograms, serial numbers, words, devices, colours, patterns, combinations, or other features or indicia printed on, embossed into, incorporated in, or otherwise forming part of, the document.

3. (Amended) A method as claimed in Claim 2 wherein:

the database contains one or more stored features/indicia for comparison by which the authentication of the document may be determined.

4. (Amended) A method as claimed in Claim 3 wherein:

the document is authenticated when the scanned features/indicia match the criteria of one or more identification

components of the stored features/indicia in the database.

5. (Amended) A method as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 4 wherein:

when a document is established to be authentic or otherwise, the signal is transmitted to the location at which the document is scanned to indicate whether or not the document is authentic or otherwise and/or to one or more alternative locations.

6. (Amended) An apparatus for authenticating a document by the method of any one of Claims 1 to 5, the apparatus including:

a terminal operable to scan one or more pre-existing identifying features or indicia of the document;

a database containing one or more stored identifying features indicative of whether or not the document is authentic or otherwise;

comparator means to compare the scanned features/indicia with the stored identifying features;

transmission means interconnecting the scanning means and the comparator means; and

indicator means operable to receive a signal from the comparator means to indicate whether or not the document is authentic or otherwise.

7. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 6 wherein:

the indicator means is provided on the terminal, and one

or more indicator means are optionally provided at alternative locations, eg., a bank security unit.

8. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 6 wherein:

the terminal includes scanning means operable to scan the scanned features/indicia, and means to transport the document past the scanning means.

9. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 8 wherein:

the scanning means incorporates one or more scanning heads, each operable to scan one or more features/indicia on the documents.

10. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 6 wherein:

the database is provided on a central computer which incorporates the comparator means.

11. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 6 wherein:

the transmission means incorporates any suitable communication means, including telephony, wireless, infra-red, hardware or the like.

12. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 8 or Claim 9 wherein:

the scanning means is a scanning head passed over the documents by hand.

13. An apparatus for authenticating a document including;

a receptacle to receive the document;

means to scan the document as the document enters the

PCT/AU00/01081
Received 03 September 2001

receptacle;

data transfer means to transfer scanned data from the scanning means;

and card means operable to receive the data; so arranged that:

the document can only be released from the receptacle when the card means is placed in, or read by, a card reader associated with the receptacle.

14. (New) A method as claimed in Claim 3 or Claim 4 wherein:

the database contains stored feature/indicia specific to each document, the stored features/indicia being stored on the database when the document enters circulation.

15. (New) A method as claimed in Claim 3 or Claim 4 wherein:

a plurality of selected areas or zones of the document are scanned for the scanned features/indicia for comparison with respective stored features/indicia for the areas or zones.

16. (New) A method as claimed in Claim 14 or Claim 15 wherein:

the scanned features/indicia are compared with the scanned features/indicia when previously scanned, enabling identification of damage or change to the document and thereby

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enable removal of the document from circulation.

17. (New) A method for authenticating the validity of a bank note in circulation, including the steps of:

(a) scanning the printed serial number of the bank note;

(b) comparing the scanned serial number against stored information in a database, identifying the serial number as authentic or otherwise;

(c) transmitting a signal whether or not the bank note is authentic or not, wherein:

the bank note is in circulation and the bank note is not modified or altered to enable the scanning to be effected.

18. (New) Apparatus for authenticating a document including:

a receptacle to receive a document;

means to scan the document as the document enters the receptacle;

data transfer means to transfer scanned data from the scanning means; and

data storage means operable to receive the data; so arranged that:

the document can only be released from the receptacle when instructed by the data storage means.

19. (New) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 18 and further

including:

means to scan the document as the document exits the receptacle;

the data transfer means transfers the scanned data from the scanning means to the data storage means; and

means to delete the scanned data from the data in the data storage means to record the removal of the document from the receptacle.

20. (New) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 19 wherein:

the documents are bank notes and the serial numbers thereof are scanned as the bank notes enter and exit the receptacle to enable a digital record of cash transactions and to record the serial numbers of bank notes held in the receptacle should theft occur.

21. (New) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 18 or Claim 19 wherein:

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the document is scanned for one or more pre-existing features and/or indicia and the scanned data is compared with a master file in the data storage means, the master file is being updated to record changes in the scanned features and/or indicia of the document.

22. (New) Apparatus as claimed in any one of Claims 18 to 21 wherein:

the data storage means is a card means operable to

receive the data, and a card reader associated with the receptacle, the document only being releasable from the receptacle when the card means is placed in, or read by, the card reader.

23. (New) Apparatus as claimed in any one of Claims 18 to 22 wherein:

the receptacle is a cash drawer, cash register, money drop box, cash box, wallet or the like.

24. (New) Apparatus according to Claim 22 wherein:

the means to scan the document is a scanning head operable to scan the document for one or more pre-existing identifying features and/or indicia; and

the data storage means includes a data writer operable to record the data onto the card means.

25. (New) Apparatus according to Claim 18 wherein:

the data storage means is an information processing unit connectable to a computer.

26. (New) A method of authenticating a document including the steps of:

scanning the document for one or more pre-existing features and/or indicia as the document enters the receptacle;

transferring the scanned data to a data storage means; and

only releasing the document from the receptacle when

instructed by the data storage means.

27. (New) The method as claimed in Claim 26 wherein:

the data storage means is a card means operable to receive the data; and

the document can only be released from the receptacle when the card means is placed in, or read by, a card reader associated with a receptacle.

28. (New) A method as claimed in Claim 26 or Claim 27 wherein:

the document can only be released from the receptacle when the scanned data corresponds to data in the data storage means.

29. (New) A method as claimed in Claim 26 and further including the steps of:

scanning the document as the document exits the receptacle; and

deleting the scanned data from the data storage means to record the removal of the document from the receptacle.